

Raghu Nath Choudhury

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The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From : Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.
Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi

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MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

Raghu Nath Choudhury

Kamaleswar Sarma



Sahitya Akademi

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To
My parents, who are no more, but
ever live in my memory :

Bhubaneswar Sarma
and
Ambika Devi

With tender remembrance and
heartfelt homage

Acknowledgement

The three books used as source of dates, events and information : 'Raghu Nath Choudhury Smriti Grantha' published by Assam Sahitya Sabha, 1968; 'Choudhurir Sahitya Pratibha' published by Sabita Sabha, 1964; 'Kavi Choudhury Aru Choudhury Devar Kabita' written by Prof. Kamaleswar Sarma and published by Assam Sahitya Sabha, 1961.

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The writer owes to all of them a deep debt of gratitude.

Kamaleswar Sarma

Foreword

Raghu Nath Choudhury dominated the literary scene of Assam for more than fifty years in the first half of the twentieth century. He made his debut in 1901 in the inaugural ceremony of the foundation day of Cotton College where he recited his self-composed poem, 'Awahan' (An Invocation) to the delight of the learned audience. The poem contained felicitous touches of nature with a tinge of deep patriotic fervour. The listeners applauded his efforts and saw in him the promise of great future. He fully lived up to their expectations. Ironically enough the man who did not see the portals of higher education wrote poems that cast their spell on the students of schools, colleges and university prosecuting their studies in Assamese medium beside others with a flair for poetry. His poem, 'Iswar' (prayer), was a part and parcel of every school boy's text at the elementary level. The poem holds sway even today from 'Iswar' to 'keteki' in a long way. A student has to traverse all this distance in order to complete his or her studies in Assamese up to B.A. or M.A. level. Lovers of poetry take pleasure in humming beautiful lines "Sadari" or "Dahikatara" justifying dictum : "A good poem communicates before it is understood."

His first anthology of poems, "Sadari" (darling) was published in 1910. As its title suggests the anthology immediately captivated the readers' mind as the 'darling' of their hearts. Calcutta University lost no time in prescribing "Sadari" as a text book for Matriculation examination. As a text book it had the longest run. The poems were so popular that these were heard and are still being heard from lips to lips. There were devotional poems like "Bhiksha" (Renunciation) people loved to recite. There were nature poems like Golap (The Rose) and "Bohagir Biya" (The Wedding of Spring) making people look a new at familiar objects with a sense of renewed love and wonder. "Sadari" ushered a new note into Assamese poetry— a

purely romantic note. Raghu Nath Choudhury was acclaimed as a high priest of the Romantic movement in Assamese poetry. In his "Kereki" (To the Nightingale) and "Dahi Katara" (To the Magpie) the new movement reached its climax.

It is said in a Sanskrit verse that under divine dispensation a mute person can turn to be eloquent and a lame person may become a climber of the hills : "Mukang Karoti Bachalang / Pangu langhayate Giri". Milton, in his blindness wrote his magnum opus, "Paradise Lost". Byron in his lameness joined the Greek war of Independence at Missolonghi and composed his "Childe Harold". Similar was the case with Raghu Nath Choudhury. He became a cripple of the left leg after an unfortunate accident when he was nine months old. He lost his mother when he was four years old. His father became insane. There was none to look after the little child. But a good samaritan, Garga Ram Choudhury, appeared on the scene in right time. He took the child to Guwahati and there he got all the amenities that a child requires for his proper growth and development. Thus by divine grace he overcame all vicissitudes of life and proved to be a redoubtable figure of Henley's poem, "Invictus" :

I am the master of Fate

I am the captain of my Soul.

At Guwahati he came to occupy a pivotal position in all literary and social activities. He was elected President of the annual session of Assam Sahitya Sabha held at Tezpur in 1936. He was called upon to preside over the cultural session of All India Peace Mission held at Calcutta in 1952. Besides presiding these important sessions he had to attend hundreds of functions at schools, colleges, students' sammilans and various literary and cultural meets. The speeches he delivered in all these meetings were marked by sweetness of tone and lucidity of expression. The last of the meetings he attended was an ovation arranged by Assam Sahitya Sabha in 1961 in honour of his life-long dedication and lasting contribution to Assamese literature. The speech he delivered in this meeting with utmost

humility and depth of understanding was his swan song. He passed away in 1967. The funeral procession that paraded through the high ways and by ways of Guwahati with thousand of mourners from all walks of life was a victory march for his indomitable courage and dazzling performance.

Raghu Nath Choudhury had to play a leading role in many of the social upheavals of the day. He was instrumental in submitting evidence before State Reorganisation Commission on linguistic basis. Even in his old age he had to lead a deputation of State language movement to Shillong. As a grand old man of Guwahati he was associated with all organisation of cultural importance. He was the founder of Sabita Sabha of Guwahati of which he remained the permanent president till the end of his eventful life at 90 years of age.

An attempt has been made in this monograph to present a picture of the epic struggle of his life and the lyric power of his poetry.

I should think my labour amply rewarded if the book succeeds in focussing a little light on the life and work of a poet of the land of 'red river and the blue hill'.

Karnaleswar Sarma

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Introduction

The moving accident is not my trade;
To freeze the blood I have no ready arts:
'Tis my delight, alone in summer shade'
To pipe a simple song for thinking hearts.

—Wordsworth : "Hart-Leap Well"

The literary work of Jean Jacques Rousseau, that strange, erratic genius of eighteenth century France, took the whole of Europe by storm. His work contained dynamite. It touched off the French Revolution and flew off the French monarchy. It set up the reign of the common man and started the vogue of cultivating rare ideas and individual thoughts. In literature it took the shape of the great Romantic Movement. The movement sought to free man's mind from the narrowing, cramping influence of industrial civilisation and the deadening and benumbing effect of customs, conventions, dogmas and tenets leaving man free to develop in his individual, original way. It paid a premium to man's originality and uniqueness. Conformity and compromise were now at a discount. It moved after fresh fields and pastures new, looking for excitement and adventures, thrills and ecstasies. All these urges and aspirations could have been satisfied only in a state of Nature, a state of simplicities and purities which, paradoxically enough, proved to be unsuitable for the harmonious development of human societies. So it is a state that man has left far behind. But the complexities of the march of civilisation and the intricacies of the growth of legal machineries with the concomitant evils made man increasingly aware of his misconceived ideas and misplaced sympathies. Gone are the days of natural feelings and simple affections, of open-hearted joy and full throated experience of pleasure. Civilisation brought man to the verge of extreme sophistication. The Romantic Movement

was a challenge to this sophistication, and for the matter of that, civilisation itself. The sensitive souls of Europe unconsciously joined in a literary movement and fought for the emancipation of man's sensibilities from the yoke of rule and reason. But the primitive ways of life are irretrievably lost. The social machinery keeps ruthlessly driving on. The man who flies in an aeroplane cannot at the same time enjoy the pleasures of walking on the ground. He can, however, look out into the bright horizons and mark the changing scenes and the shifting vistas and admire the land-scape and the sky-scape. Thus arose the necessity of vicarious pleasure. What man had lost in society he began to discover in nature. Love of nature became an integral part of the Romantic Movement. Nature never ceased to attract poets. But the romantic conception of nature was fundamentally different. The Augustans introduced nature in poetry merely for decorative or descriptive purposes. The romantics attributed all the living qualities to nature. The soul of the poet was solicitous for establishing contact with the soul of Nature. That is why romantic poetry is often defined as the rediscovery of nature. From the infinite introspections of Rousseau there developed an intense attachment to nature. Nature that was used by the poets of the preceding ages as a quarry of similes and metaphors, images and symbols, became inextricably mixed up with the poetic imagination of the nineteenth century. Rousseau's famous gospel, 'Go back to Nature' became an article of faith with the new group of Nature poets. If Rousseau was the prophet of the movement Wordsworth was its evangelist. He looked to nature with the reverence and humility of a true devotee. He set the muse of poetry to sing about the glories of Nature.

His poems are like the choric songs of the Greek drama sung before an altar recounting the manifold qualities and virtues of the Deity and stressing the need of efficacy of its worship. Wordsworth firmly believed that 'Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her;' and complained that 'Little do we see in Nature that is ours.' He would rather be a 'pagan suckled in a creed outworn' than live in the corrupting, baneful surroundings of modern life,

cut off from the vital springs of joy and happiness. Taking their cue from Rousseau and Wordsworth other poets joined in the chorus of humanising nature or naturalising man. Nature, thus became an all pervasive force in the romantic variety of world literature.

In Raghu Nath Choudhury, Assamese poetry found a perfect exponent of the new faith and interest in Nature. From the time of Madhab Kandali, a poet of the fourteenth century, Assamese poetry has been fully responsive to natural effects and natural beauties. But nature assumed new importance in the eye of the poets who flourished in Assam in the early part of the twentieth century. It is at this time that the influence of the romantic movement was felt in Assam. Beginning from 'Kadamkali' (the buds of the Kadamba flower) of Lakshmi Nath Bezbaroa and "Pratima" (An Idol) of Chandra Kumar Agarwala coming down to "Papari" (The Pollens) and "Swapnabhanga" (the broken dream) and "Rupiyoti" (the resplendent beauty) of Ganesh Gogoi and "Sagar Dekhicha" (The appeal of the sea) of Deba Kanta Barua, Assam reaped a rich harvest of Romantic poetry. Amongst the Romantic poets Raghu Nath Choudhury lived, moved and had his being in the world of nature. His love of nature finds its fullest expression in the poems of "Sadari", (the darling), "Keteki" (to the Nightingale), "Dahikatara" (to the Magpie) and the prose-poems of "Naba Mallika" (the new violets). "Keteki" and "Dahikatara" are the completed expressions of nature-poems in Assamese literature. The poems of Raghu Nath Choudhury bring Assamese literature closer to the vast poetic movement that swept through the modern world; especially in the important aspect of its attitude to Nature; and this fact places the Assamese poet in the exalted brotherhood of nature-poets whose works fulfil the noble dictum of the devout poet John Milton : 'A good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life'.

Raghu Nath Choudhury seems to be a visitor from the pagan world. His kinship is with Nature, with all its sights and sounds,

forms and colours, nuances and cadences. He is a total stranger to the complex world of ties and titles; and habitually dwells in the world of cooing and chirping birds and fragrance and incense-bearing flowers and the soothing sight of the green leaves and mellow fruits. He shares fully the joys and sorrows of nature. He looks out into the bright world; follows with his acute sensibilities the changes of seasons; and his changing moods find their fitting expressions in his poems. In Spring he is delighted; in Winter he is depressed. In his poem "Hepah" (The desire) he has painted a little lovely world of Spring with fullness of colour and freshness of appeal. In a bright sunny spring morning the poet is looking out to a lotus-pond. He is captivated by the sight of innumerable lotuses blooming in the beautiful lake. The vernal breeze begins to blow and scatter all the delicious coolness and fragrance in the land. The humming bees turn the lake into a melodious plot. The sun slowly rises in the east and throws its golden colours all over the world. The poet gazes all around him in all the joyousness of his heart. The bright day passes making room for the soft, white radiance of the moon. It was a full-moon night. The lovely image of the moon is fully reflected in the transparent waters of the lake. The poet gazes at the image and is lost in wonder. It is a perfect form; a matchless design. It is the queen of Beauty, the soul of Delight. In his fullness of feeling and ecstasy of emotion the poet lifts his hand muttering to himself—'I wish I were the lake to embrace the fair image of the Moon'. It is a perfect picture of spring and a perfect portrayal of the poet's mood of happiness without any attempt at vain moralising. Like Keats Raghu Nath Choudhury is a painter-poet. His poems have 'no palpable design upon us' but they have a perfect design of their own suggested by the creative instinct and artistic conscience of a sensitive heart. Pictures such as these were possible only for the Venetian artists.

In contrast to the moments of happiness the poet has his moments of grief. Even here his heart moves in sympathy with the spirit of nature. In nature the happiness of Spring or Autumn is counter balanced by the dreariness of Summer or Winter. The

poet is fully responsive to the sense of poignant pathos of nature and he convincingly relates it to the woeful tale of man's misery. His poem "Bishad" (the grief) is a contrasting study to his poem, "Hepah" (the desire). "Bishad" is a study in contrast within itself. Once in a late autumn morning the poet was out in the field. His attention was drawn by the sewali flowers blooming with small, soft, white petals, fluttering in the mild air. A sparrow perched upon a branch of the sewali plant. The poet saw the bird playing with the flowers, now dancing, now singing. The poet was beside himself with joy to see the little bird dancing merrily and singing happily in the midst of the flowers and leaves of the plant. The bird was an earnest actor, and the poet, an interested spectator. But the scene changed with a lightning rapidity. The sweet drama took a sudden turn to a heart-rending tragic piece. A severe gust of wind, forerunner of the wild west wind of the succeeding season, suddenly upset the whole show. Autumn gave way to winter. The wind flew with a sleety whistle and brought hail and storm in its wake. The tiny white flowers fell down on the ground and lay buried under the dust of the earth. The branches of the sewali broke off the flowers and leaves dropped down; and the sewali plant stood bare and naked. The bird flew away—no body knows where. All was dark and bleak. The poet was dumb founded. The change was so sudden and so complete that he could hardly trust his eyes. It automatically set him thinking deeply about the chances and changes of human life. Life appeared to him to be no better than a 'falling shower a breaking billow'. It is so transient, so evanescent. His line of thinking was similar to the wise Sanskrit saying—'Ma Kuru Dhana, Jana, Joubana Garbam'—'Do not be proud of power and self, of progeny and youth'. The poet thought that in Nature autumn will again appear in due course. The flowers will again bloom in time. And the sparrow will again arrive and play. But the joy of the poet's heart is irrecoverably lost. In the span of man's life, there can be only one spring, one autumn : in other words, one childhood and one youth. Once it is gone, it is gone for ever. In the life of man the season disappears never to re-

appear. How short a spring visits man's life to leave it empty and barren with tormenting memories and agonising reminiscences. All these reflections arose naturally in the poet's mind as he looked at the storm-tossed scene and the ravages it had wrought before his eyes. It brings home to our mind the truth that 'Sorrow's crown of sorrow in remembering happier things'. "Bishad" (the grief) is a finely meditative poem set against a perfectly natural background. A sweet moral lesson is artfully conveyed. But the unobtrusiveness of its moral note is the measure of its success.

Raghu Nath Choudhury was no great revolutionary, nor a daring innovator. He founded no school and propounded no doctrine. But his life has a rugged grandeur and a tragic beauty of its own. He started life as an invalid. Hardly he was nine months old when he met with a serious accident. He fell from a high plinth, tumbled down to the ground, struck against a slab of stone, broke his left leg and damaged his right one which was also hopelessly weak. Since then a wooden stick became an indispensable part of his life. This was only a beginning of a frightful series of miseries and misfortunes that distressed and darkened the period of the poet's infancy. Disaster stared the family in the face when Raghu Nath Choudhury was four years old. At that time cholera broke out in the village and the victims were no other than the mother, the elder brother and sister of Raghu Nath Choudhury. At first he could not realise the significance of his mother's death but his father was the hardest hit : he lost his mental balance and equilibrium. A crippled child, an orphan, Raghu Nath Choudhury had no where to go! He lay there alone, neglected and uncared for. The unsocial elements including some kinsmen took advantage of the situation and robbed the family of its belongings; they grabbed the landed property and took away the ancestral ornaments, utensils and furniture under the pretext of safe upkeep and proper management. But the most unwanted thing was the child. The promising son of a happy house found himself wallowing in a bog of wretchedness. At this time a generous man of the village, a good samaritan, Joypal Das, took pity on the

deserted child and gladly undertook the responsibility of bringing up the child in his own home. There he grew up for sometime until his father regained his sanity and took back the child for proper development under his custody. He appointed a home-tutor and looked up to his basic needs so that the child could one day grow up to the expectations that the family priest one day aroused in his mind prescribing the name Raghu Nath in the image of the epic King Ram Chandra of ancient India. But the bewildered father who had faced a dismal past could not think of a bright future for his son who was now in the school-going stage. Fortunately for them there appeared in the house of Bholanath Choudhury another good samaritan a distant kinsman of the family. He was Gargaram Choudhury, a Nazir of D.C's court and a well-to-do man of Guwahati, the premier town of Assam. On the other hand he was lacking in the graces of progeny. He was a god-send to the ruined family. He took the ill-starred lame child with him and made him the centre of all affection and care of the family at Guwahati. There Raghu Nath Choudhuri began to grow up in an atmosphere of warmth and sunshine under the loving care and tender attention of the whole house and a big circle centering round the family. It was the strange hand of destiny that saved the precious life of Raghu Nath and gave appropriate setting for his future development.

The boy was taught his early lessons at home. Then he was sent to a local school wherefrom he passed middle vernacular final examination with credit. Next he was admitted to the Town High School now known as Collegiate Higher Secondary School. He gave a good account of himself in school examinations. But, as ill luck would have it, he picked up a quarrel with the Mathematics teacher and left school for good. At this time his father passed away. The news came to him as a bolt from the blue. The last surviving link with the family was now snapped. All the sadness and harshness of the world settled on his head and he felt that nothing could lift the 'smothering weight off his breast'. Everything appeared to him 'void, dark and drear'. This was the second

darkest period of his life. During this period he took the hardest decision not to go to school but to go to the field at Beltola and to start cultivation at their farm-house there. Time gradually took away much of the sting that fortune inflicted on him as he began to take lively interest in the management of the farm. Son of a cultivator, he instinctively knew the art of cultivation. He replenished the farm with hard labour and systematic planning. But this period of intensive cultivation was marked by an equally intensive absorption in finer, deeper recesses of his mind. The result was a fine and excellent crop of lyric poems unsurpassed and unsurpassable in Assamese poetry for their inherent appeal and intrinsic beauty and comparable only to the best of nature poetry in all literatures.

I

Glimpses of life

Raghu Nath Choudhury was born in 1878 at Laopara, a village in Kamrup district about twenty kilometres away from Guwahati, the present capital of Assam. The day of his birth was a very auspicious one. Ganesh Puja was celebrated on that day followed by Saraswati Puja on the following day. His father, Bholanath Choudhury, was offering anjali in the puja when the good news of the birth of his son was conveyed to him. Bholanath hurriedly came home followed by the family priest. The priest saw good signs in the Almanac and called him by the name of Raghunath, reminiscent of the epic king Ramachandra of ancient India. Every one appreciated the name and congratulated Bholanath as a proud father of a promising son. An atmosphere of gaiety and jubilation prevailed over the whole village. Special mention was made of the fact that the birth of the child synchronised with the celebration of the Ganesh Puja. Importance was also attached to the prediction made by the village priest.

Bholanath Choudhury was a rich man of the village. He belonged to the feudal aristocracy of the time. He worked with the peasants; lived happily with his wife Dayalata Choudhury, his two sons, one daughter and other relatives and friends. Raghu Nath was the apple of their eye. But man proposes, God disposes. Dame Luck was playing its cruel tricks with Raghu Nath. One sad morning, when little Raghu Nath was just nine months old, he fell from a high plinth, rolled down to the courtyard and struck against a slab of stone. Severe injury was caused to his arms and legs. All the improvised bandages and application of local herbs and shrubs prescribed by the village physicians could not save his left leg from being permanently damaged and the right leg from being hopelessly

weak since then, a small wooden stick became an indispensable part of his life. One might almost say that he was born with the crutch in his hand. Inscrutable are the ways of God. The man who replenished poetry with all the beauties of nature could not enjoy a single footstep on the surface of the mother earth.

So began the hapless and hopeless life of Raghu Nath Choudhury. As he began to grow misfortunes began to dog him at every foot step. When he was four years old cholera broke out in the village in an epidemic form. The first victims were the elder brother and sister of Raghu Nath Choudhury. Then it was the turn of his mother, the sweetest and the dearest thing on earth. Edgar Allan Poe lost his mother at the age of three. The sight of his mother dying of consumption left an indelible mark on his mind and later transposed itself into the figures of Berenice, Morella, Eleonora and Ligeria. Raghu Nath Choudhury, too, has a vivid recollection of the tragic irony of the scene of his mother's death. She passed away in the early hours of the morning. Raghu Nath, the child, woke up to find his dear mother lying outside in the courtyard all covered with white cloth and surrounded by grim, tearful faces. The child was astonished to mark the contrast between the strange but peaceful manner of his mother's sleep and the distressed and ominous look of the by-standers. The child's instinctive reaction to the scene reminds one of the simple but moving words of the little maid of Wordsworth's lovely lyric, "We Are Seven"—

Two of us in the church-yard lie,
My sister and my brother;
And, in the church-yard cottage, I
Dwell near them with my mother.'

When the significance of the tragic event was brought home to his mind he involuntarily burst into a paroxysm of irresistible cries. He felt as if the whole sky was breaking in upon his head and the entire ground was suddenly drifting away from under his feet. A mysterious fear seized him and choked his voice. It seemed

he was frantically moving in an abysmal darkness, groping for solid support; and gasping for air and light. Later on, when he composed his fine elegiac poem "Matridevi" he drew upon this solid base of deep personal anguish :

Akalsaria Kari Guchi Gola Ai
Chowa Bara Adhamar Ki Hol Bilai.

(Oh! my mother! you left me all alone;
See! how your dear son is grovelling in the sun.)

The effect of the tragic scenes of devastation on Bholanath was terrible. He saw before his eyes the members of his family falling one after another like leaves in winter. He could not stand such a series of rude shocks. He lost his calmness and sanity.

At this time the antisocial elements including some of his near relatives took advantage of the situation. A rumour was spread that Bholanath had gone mad and his property both movable and immovable needed proper upkeep and care. Under this pretext they emptied his store-houses, looted his property, took away the live-stock, stole gold and silver and what not! The full house was now a deserted one. Only Wordsworth could depict such cruelty and inhumanity of man to man :

And much it grieved my soul to think.

What man has made of man!

Bholanath who was tied to a post and bound hands and feet somehow extricated himself and ran away from this scene of atrocity and barbarity. His whereabouts were not known for about a year. And what happened to the little invalid child? He ran helter skelter for help. At this time, Jaypal Das a generous man of the village and a distant relative of Bholanath graciously offered the much needed shelter to Raghu Nath. He told his daughter, Sonmai, to look upon Raghu Nath as her own brother. There Raghu Nath lived happily for about a year. In the meantime Bholanath recovered from the mental shock. He returned home and started setting his own house in order. He took Raghu Nath to his home and arranged

home tutor for his education. But Bholanath was very much worried about his child's education in the proper sense of the terms.

After a lapse of a few months there appeared in the house of Bholanath Choudhury another good samaritan Gargaram Choudhury a distant relative and Nazir of D.C.'s court at Guwahati. Gargaram Choudhury was a God-send to Raghu Nath Choudhury's life. There was instant acceptance of the proposal of Gargaram that he desired to take Raghu Nath Choudhury to Guwahati for his proper education and upbringing. Gargaram Choudhury was yet to be blessed with a child. The presence of Raghu Nath Choudhury in the house will remove a long-felt want of the family. On the other hand, Bholanath Choudhury had no means to give proper guidance to the young child. When he came from Laopara to Guwahati, there was a sea-change in the life of Raghu Nath Choudhury. He emerged from darkness to light. He not only satisfied the long cherished desire of the family of Gargaram Choudhury for a child but also received the much needed solace and support from all members of the family and the wide circle connected with it.

In a happy, healthy atmosphere Raghu Nath began to grow. Care and comfort, tenderness and affection he received in abundance. His spirit began to unfurl. For physical well-being and mental nourishment, nothing was amiss in the new surroundings. Swarnalata Choudhury, wife of Gargaram Choudhury, was the presiding deity of the household affairs. She was full of sweetness and cheerfulness. Though a sister-in-law by relation she loved Raghu Nath with more than a mother's heart. She was a never-failing source of service and inspiration to him. Under their hearty dispensation Raghu Nath felt a bliss he could never think of. He has tasted the cup of bitterness from his birth; now sweetness has started pouring on his life. Shadows of depression and dejection are gone. He was now basking in the sunshine of affluence and delight. His feeling of well-being has now got over his feeling of deformity. He started growing both physically and mentally. Even

his right leg became active though his left leg was damaged beyond repair. Life was so gay and attractive that he stopped worrying about his left leg since his right leg now worked properly. He started walking from Uzanbazar, the posh area of Guwahati, to Kacharighat and back to Panbazar, the hub of the town. He started taking interest in books, nature and man. Gargaram Choudhury was a very influential person of the time. All the elites of the town met in his house. It was a centre of culture, literature, law and education. He was overjoyed to hear the learned discourses of scholars like Pandit Dhireswaracharyya, Hem Chandra Goswami, Sonaram Choudhury, Prof. Satya Nath Bora, and many others. Under the impact of this congenial atmosphere the mind and spirit of Raghu Nath began to expand, his talents, so long dormant, began to blossom. He joined the best school of the time, got the best tutor in his home. His school performance was impressive. He passed middle vernacular examination with credit. In those days M. V. Pass certificate was considered sufficient to become a Mandal or a Primary School teacher. But he chose to continue his studies and was admitted to the High School section of the School, later upgraded and known as Collegiate Higher Secondary School. He composed poems and got applause from the intellectuals who assembled in the house every now and then.

Everything went well for sometime. All of a sudden there was a rift in the lute. He left school after a minor scuffle with the teacher of Mathematics. The teacher found fault with his working out of a sum. 'The answer was correct but the method was wrong,' said his teacher. 'Sir,' the pupil answered, 'there may be other methods. If the answer is correct I should get mark.' 'No,' the teacher commented, 'in my class you must follow my method.' The statement of the teacher smacked of high handedness. He appealed to the Head Master for justice. But it was in vain. 'Where there is no justice, there is no education' he contemplated within himself and decided then and there to leave school for good. For a time he played truant and left for Tezpur where he spent for about a month. The prodigal son returned home, but the truant

never returned to the school. He is impulsive and unbending. No amount of counselling would do him any good. He would not change for the world. Instead he started learning Sanskrit in his own home under the guidance of the great Sanskrit scholar, Mahamahopadhyay Dhireswaracharyya and Bal Mukunda Jha, a Sanskrit scholar of Mithila. The two scholars were temporarily living in the house of Gargaram Choudhury. This gave a unique opportunity to Raghunath to come in close contact with the two Sanskrit scholars and famous students of Panini and Ratnamala. They not only taught him grammar and the sastras but also the kavyas of Kalidas, Bhababhuti, Magh and Bharabi. Though his formal education came to an abrupt end at class VIII his love of learning continued unabated. At school he was encouraged to cultivate his literary talents. This now became his life-long absorption. One of his school teachers made him a contributor to a Bengali magazine, *Sanjibani*, which introduced him to Bengali literature. Now in his full freedom he became an avid student of books of Assamese, Bengali and Sanskrit regularly at the feet of the two great Sanskrit scholars who led him not only through the intricacies of Panini and Ratnamala but also through the delicacies of *Meghadut* and *Kumarsambha*:

Away from school he found interest in the wider school of social activities. He started a cultural organisation called 'Suniti Sancharini Sabha'. His ex-competitors in school, Kamakha Ram Barua (later, a renowned judge), Hemanta Kumar Lahiri, (later a redoubtable advocate), Shrish Chandra Chakravorty (later a famous professor) and others were now his comrades in arms. They all decided to start a library under the aegis of 'Suniti Sancharini Sabha'. Many senior citizens also helped them in their honest endeavour. One Jagabandhu Das offered a room and an almirah for this noble purpose. Raghu Nath contributed his two journals, "Sanjibani" and "Hitabadi" in the name of the library. Other magazines in the library were "Weekly Epithany" from the Christian Missionaries of Calcutta, "Assam" edited by Kali Ram Barua, "Assam Bilasini" of Krisna Kanta Bhattacharyya. In no time the library

grew up to be a full-fledged movement to the great delight of the sponsors, of which Raghu Nath was the pioneer. Though disgusted with the prevalent system of education, in his heart of hearts he was enamoured of its aims and objectives. He knew that it is education that brought him face to face with books and books are the invaluable possessions of mankind. This made him interested in the establishment of the library that brought him in touch with the works of the great masters. He took up library work as challenge and a substitute to formal education. Education is a life-long process and he remained its votary until his death as a nonagerian. He made the library his second home. Once in the library he was lost in books. It was like following Carlyle's dictum : 'A true university is nothing but a collection of books.' Here he read from Madhab Kandali to Lakshminath Bezbaroa, from Bankimchandra to Rabindranath besides Balmiki, Kalidas, Bhababhuti and Tulsidas. Library became the real source of his mental and spiritual nourishment. Freed from the drudgery of routine life, he now moved like the wind that 'bloweth wherever it listeth'. His observation of nature was deepened; his contact with life widened. Taking regular strolls by the side of the Brahmaputra, reading books on various subjects in the library, learning Sanskrit lessons at home from the great masters, writing poems in secrets, engaging himself in social work—these were the self-chosen manifold activities that absorbed all attention and time of Raghu Nath, there was not a dull moment in his life. He now belonged in spirit to the illustrious band of writers from Shakespeare who had 'little Latin and less Greek' to Rabindranath but Rabindranath's knowledge of the human heart and observation of nature excelled all other bookish writers justifying Hamlet's observation :

There are more things in heaven and earth;

Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

Stevenson rightly observed : 'Which others are filling their memory with a lumber of words..... your truant may learn some useful art: to play the fiddle..... or to speak with ease and opportunity with

all varieties of men.A bird will sing in the thicket. And there he may fall into a vein of kindly thought, and see things in a new perspective why, if this is not education, what is?' Shelley referred to the trees as the best of tutors—'These trees are my books; they tell no lies'. Thus as a teenager Raghu Nath began to see 'sermons in stones and love in everything'. He sought enlightenment from all sides keeping all windows of the mind open to receive all new influences, impulses and impressions from all sides about man, nature and the world at large.

As he left school, Gargaram Choudhury thought of engaging him in some job in the revenue office. But such a job never appealed to his taste as it smacked of legality and formality. At the same time he was appointed Head Pandit of Uzan Bazar Primary School under Guwahati Municipal administration. 'Children are the flowers of humanity', he thought and instinctively chose this job. But fate again conspired against his life. His father, Bholanath Choudhury, suddenly died of cholera. This was a bolt from the blue to Raghunath. His only tie with the family was now snapped. He felt a void in his heart never to be filled up; an anguish never to be relieved. Tears rolled down his cheeks—tears that welled out from the depth of his heart. Tears are his only solace; tears are his sole companion. Later on, in his devotional poem, "Bhiksha" (Renunciation) he refers to tears in his memorable lines :

Mukher Hahiti Jadi Sio Mar Jai

Chinna Hai Asha Lata Jupi

Santana Diota Mok Ache Lagaria

Visadar Chakulo Atupi

(Let the smiles from my lips disappear; let all my hopes wither. I will never miss the solace of my tears that involuntarily burst out from my eyes)

The lines have a Tennysonian ring, though the poet had little access to Tennyson :

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,

Tears from the depth of some divine despair
 Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
 In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,
 And thinking of the days that are no more,

His was a tormented soul. One sorrow reminded him of another—an endless series that dogged him in every footstep of his life. Even in his best and happiest moments, sorrows and sadness did not leave him to embitter his very being. The sudden death of Gargaram Choudhury in 1903 came to him with the keenest of the arrows. His only benefactor and guardian of life also left him in his early twenties with the dying words ringing in his ears : 'Raghu, I am going, leaving everything to you. Take care of the little child, my only son Umesh and his mother. Never leave them, you are my only hope. I am sure all my property and family will be safe under your care and custody.' With these parting words he passed away leaving behind his wife, his four year son and the vast property entirely under the solitary control of young Raghu Nath. This was the last straw on the camels back. He was familiar with all kinds of misfortunes and hardships since his birth. But this time it was something undreamt of he stood speechless and dumb with bereavement and bewilderment. He cried like Keats :

.....On the shore
 of the wide world, I stand alone and think
 Till love and fame to nothingness do sink

"Nothingness", the Senecan word seemed to have filled the recesses of his mind. "Nothing survives! Everything passes." What remains was a dark, dreary and uncertain future. In his own words, 'he felt like a tree, standing alone in the middle of a vast field—fruitless, leafless, lifeless and bare' ('Maj Patharat Thake Jen Akaloi Patra Phalahin Taru')

Time is the greatest healer. With the passage of time he gradually awoke to the hard realities of life. He stood like a rock : young

but strong; physically deformed but spiritually growing. 'Sweet are the uses of adversity.' He took the vow of celibacy to fulfil the trust so lovingly and faithfully reposed on him by the dying declaration of Gargaram Choudhury. He took up all reins of management in his own hand and all matters were brought under his control within a short time. Gargaram Choudhury amassed vast landed property in and around Guwahati. He visited all the areas, collected revenues from the ryots and disposed of all disputes amicably to the full satisfaction of all concerned including Mrs. Swarnalata Choudhury, the widow of Gargaram Choudhury. This was his first venture to wipe out the tears from the eyes of the widow. In the second phase he arranged for the best available education and upbringing of Umesh Chandra Choudhury, a four year son of Garga Choudhury. No body could imagine that Umesh Choudhury will one day bring smiles not only to his mother but also to his motherland as a first class lyric poet of Assam and an able officer of the Government of Assam. All this was due to the firmness and adroitness in handling the household affairs by Raghu Nath Choudhury. He occupied a pre-eminent position of importance in the family which he retained until his dying day at the ripe old age of ninety years.

Gargaram Choudhury had a vast cultivable land lying unutilised at Beltola. Raghu Nath Choudhury thought of reclaiming the land and opening a model farmhouse there. As he thought, so he worked. His work as teacher was over as the school under the Municipality was abolished. Son of a cultivator he decided to engage himself heart and soul into the cultivation work. The centre of gravity now shifted to Beltola about eight kilometres away from Guwahati. He controlled his domestic activities of Uzanbazar from Beltola where he built up a small hut and began to live and work with the tribal people of the village. The tribal people consisted of Lalung Kacharis, Miris, Mikirs and Garos. They were very simple and honest. Raghu Nath Choudhury loved these people very much. He saw that they were addicted of opium. He took

up his cudgel against this bad habit. They were also the victims of usury practised by some unscrupulous money-lenders. The result was that they lived perpetually under debt, dirt and disease. Raghu Nath started a campaign against opium-eating and usury. The people responded to his call. He engaged them in his paddy field, vegetable garden, flower treatment and other horticulture and wild-life protection and improvement activities. Raghu Nath gave good incentive to the workers engaged in ploughing the field, cleaning the ground, sowing the seeds, weeding the garden, watering the plantation and all other activities connected with the farm. People were highly relieved of their economic burden. The organisation also succeeded in weaning the villagers from their age-old habit of opium eating. He was the much sought-after man at Beltola. Far from the madding crowd, under the greenwood tree, amidst the unsophisticated people he saw a new life full of peace and harmony, love and friendship. The willing workers filled his mind with joy. His heart began to dance when he saw golden crops dancing in the field. He was lost in wonder and admiration. It is a perfectly Wordsworthian mood when he saw a host of golden daffodils :

And then my heart with pleasure fills,

And dances with the daffodils.

Here the poet in him had its great awakening. In the tranquil atmosphere he composed poems after poems that started coming out in magazines and journals. Like the Horton Period of Milton, Beltola period of Raghu Nath Choudhury was not only agriculturally productive but also poetically fertile. In the agricultural field his work was highly appreciated. No less a person than Gopi Nath Bordoloi, later on the first Chief Minister of Assam, one day visited the firm and wrote the following warm letter as Raghu Nath was not present in the firm at the time of visit, 'Dear Sri Choudhury, I know you are a poet. But what I saw in your garden is poetry in action. Rows of beans, cabbages, cauli-flowers greeted my eyes. I was captivated to see the yellow flowers of the mustard seeds surrounded by green, red and blue flowers. All my cares and

anxieties vanished as I enjoyed the sight. Really I forgot whether I was on earth or in Indra's Amaravati, (the heavenly garden of Indra, the God of heaven). You are supplying fresh vegetables to the citizens of Guwahati. At the same time, you are a poet of renown. A peasant and a poet! Your services are invaluable. May you live long to serve the motherland and inspire the people with your noble ideal of 'plain living and high thinking.'

His stars were now on the ascent. The evil eye of the Saturn now gave way to the benign influence of Jupiter. Whatever he touched he adorned. A pioneer of the library movement, a teacher of the tiny tots, an editor of Jayanti, an ideal home-maker, and inspiring reformer, a top-ranking farmer, a budding poet—he excelled in all that he started. From 1908 to 1921 he spent most of the time in Beltola, new in irrigation and plantation work, again in eradication of age old superstition and bad habit of the people and some time in composing precious poems when enraptured by cuckoo's song or intoxicated by the fragrance and beauty of the rose. During this period for three years he was again a teacher in a German Missionary school from 1911 to 1914. The school was disbanded when World War I broke out. He was glad to get rid of the routine type of work and returned to his creative work at Beltola to which his heart yearned. But a greater call awaited him—the call of the nation. He joined the non-co-operation movement of 1921 for which he was arrested and sentenced to fifteen month's imprisonment. After a week Gopi Nath Bordoloi was also arrested and sent to the same jail. When he was released he went straight to his farm-house at Beltola only find everything in shambles. The store-house were broken and empty. His dwelling house lay upside down. People fled for fear of Police. Flowers gave place to weeds. Paddy fields were covered with jungles. Where are the bananas? The sugarcanes? The vegetables! All his love's labour was lost. He was not prepared to see such devastation, such desolation. He knew this was the price he had to pay for joining freedom movement. But freedom is our birth right. No price is too high to establish this right, he contemplated. With a

heavy heart and swollen eyes he returned to his original home at Uzanbazar. His residence now became the centre of all attractions. Members of the family were delighted to get him permanently in their midst. Freedom-fighters, social workers, lawyers, journalists, writers, old and new, haunted his house for discussion and advice. His was a pleasant personality. He never disappointed anybody. Every body returned with ripples of laughter in his or her face. His collection of poems, "Sadari" (Darling), "Keteki" (To the nightingale)", "Karbala", "Dahikatara" (To Magpie) became the talk of the town. He was elected President of Assam Sahitya Sabha held at Tezpur in 1935. His fame spread far and wide.

Editing magazine was an abiding interest of Raghu Nath Choudhury's life. He was first offered Asst. Editorship of "Jonaki" when the magazine was published from Guwahati under the editorship of Prof. Satya Nath Bora. That was in his early twenties. He showed acumen in selecting articles and presenting them in appropriate forum. Later on, he was made sole incharge of the poetry section of the magazine. When the publication of the magazine was shifted to Calcutta he could not continue his work due to his preoccupation with family affairs. But he started "Maina", a children magazine from Guwahati. "Maina" was an attracting magazine for children and it gave scope both to the writers and to the young learners. Next he turned to "Jayanti", a special mouthpiece for the modernist movement in Assamese literature. As usual the magazine died after one year and a half. But Choudhury's zeal for publishing magazine did not diminish. His next venture was publication of "Surabhi". In 1940 the "Surabhi" appeared in a fortnightly form. It was a collection of serious articles of literary and cultural importance. In contrast to the ravages of war, the readers relished the flavour of the delicious reading materials published in "Surabhi." Under Choudhury's individual initiative and drive the magazine had a comparatively long run.

In 1945 the holocaust of Nagasaki and Hiroshima shook the world to its foundation. The havoc of war made the move for

peace more pertinent and all-pervasive. World Peace Mission was formed. At Guwahati Choudhury took a leading part in spreading the messages of peace and friendship. Peace March was organised in many parts of the state. "We want peace", "Stop this Bomb", "Prepare for Life, not death"—were the slogans displayed on the banners and shouted by the peace marchers. Public meetings held and resolutions, passed in the meeting, were signed by all members present and despatched to the head quarters. Raghu Nath Choudhury got high acclaim for his services in connection with the Peace Mission. Moscow Radio announced his name as 'a unique voice of love and peace in a world torn by fear and hatred'. He was invited to attend an all India Peace Mission Convention held at Calcutta in 1952. Glowing tributes were paid to him in the convention. 'Mr. Choudhury, your contribution for the movement of world peace is invaluable,' said Mulk Raj Anand and called him 'a true poet and an indefatigable worker'. In reply, Raghu Nath Choudhury made an impassioned appeal to the authorities that be to exterminate the inhuman elements from human society so that mankind may enjoy true peace and happiness in a really civilised sense. His speech was translated into English by Syed Abdul Malik a noted litterateur of Assam. After his speech Prithiraj Kapoor went up to the dais and called him 'Dada' and took a snap to the hilarious applause of the huge audience.

Now the poet has emerged on the national scene. Govt. of India awarded him literary pension in 1952. In 1953 he founded 'Sabita Sabha', a socio-cultural and literary organisation of Guwahati of which he was the permanent President until the last days of his life. The publications brought out by the 'Sabita Sabha'—"Gohain Baruar Sahitya Pratibha", "Jibani Mala", "Bezbaruar Sahitya Pratibha", "Choudhurir Sahitya Pratibha" are landmarks of Assamese prose literature. All this and much more were due to the inspiring leadership of its founder President Raghu Nath Choudhury. The magic of the printed word haunted him to the end. "Nabamallika", a collection of prose-poems published in

1958 when he was eighty years old, was another fruit of this aspiration so carefully and tenderly nurtured throughout his life. As a grand old man of Guwahati he was always at the fore front of all social upheavals of the state. Assam's plea before the State Reorganisation Commission on linguistic basis found in him an eloquent exponent. The Refinery movement, the state language movement and all other social upheavals of the state found in him a ready source of reference, guidance and inspiring participation.

A huge public ovation was arranged in 1961 in honour of the octogenarian poet at Guwahati by Assam Sahitya Sabha in collaboration with Sabita Sabha. The public meeting held at Sadmersen Hall was packed to capacity. There was an unending stream of speakers in the meeting presided over by Justice Holiram Deka, the then chief Justice of Assam High Court. A commemorative volume entitled "Kabi Choudhury and Choudhury Dewar Kabita", written by Prof. Kamaleswar Sarma of Cotton College and published by Assam Sahitya Sabha was handed over to the poet with all pomp and grandeur by Prof. Maheswar Neog, the then secretary of Assam Sahitya Sabha. With great humility and dignity the poet accepted the offer and heartily thanked the organisers and all those who were present on the occasion. In his suave and succinct reply he said, 'I am no poet. By poet I understand Balmiki and Kalidas, Sankar Dev and Rabindra Nath. I simply dabbled in verse. I am a simple man without education; a humble worker without ambition. I did only what I could—what I was capable of doing with my poor abilities. It is your generosity and greatness that you call me a poet. I do not deserve this at all. You have given me this unique opportunity of meeting you and expressing my sincere thanks and my deep debt of gratitude to all of you. Jai Hand.' An impassioned speech delivered with ease and grace. There was nothing of the feebleness of a man of eighty-three; but the clarity and sweetness of robust optimistic soul. The audience was held spell-bound. Little could they imagine that was the swan song of the poet, our dear Raghu Ata, the grand old man of Guwahati. In 1967 he passed way full of years and full of honours.

II

The Efflorescence

We have discussed the occasion and the time of composition and publication of poems and magazines of Raghu Nath Choudhury in the foregoing chapters. Now we propose to discuss the trends and the culmination of the trends in his poems. The first thing that strikes us is his persistent interest in nature, particularly in two of its most visible and adorable aspects—birds and flowers. The first poem he published was about birds—"Maramar Pakhi" (My Beloved Bird). Really speaking birds remained his 'beloved' subject throughout his life. The growth and development of his feeling for birds is a theme of perennial interest. Deep down in the bottom in his heart he felt a unity with the ever free and exuberant life of birds. The fancy that runs through "Maramar Pakhi", "Gowahe Abar Mor Priya Bihangini" and "Keteki Charai" published in "Sadari" in 1910 gathered momentum as time moved in and culminated in his long poems, called kavyas, named "Ketaki" published in 1918 and "Dahikatarā" published in 1921. Holiram Deka and Bani Kanta Kakati were the two pioneer critics of the poetry of Raghu Nath Choudhury. They spoke of him as a true bird-poet after exhaustive study of his poems with appropriate references to Kalidas, Bhababhuty, Wordsworth, Tennyson and other poets of East and West. Succeeding critics followed suit and the title, "bird-poet", adorned his name ever afterwards.

What was a simple theme of delight and attraction in "Maramar Pakhi" has grown to be indistinguishably mixed up with the psyche of the poet. The movement of his mind has been identified with the movement of the bird. In "Maramar Pakhi" he caught hold of a bird; kept it 'onfined to a golden cage; gave it pure spring water to drink and fresh and delicious fruits to eat. But the bird

craved for freedom and one day it found an opening and flew away to the deep dense forest of which it was a permanent dweller. The poet was deeply hurt to lose the bird and, what was more to miss its melody. In later poems, "Keteki", it is not the melody of the bird that haunted him. What impels him now is a bond of spiritual kinship that connects the present with the past, the living with the non-living, the temporal with the eternal. This oneness with nature, this self-identification with the bird is the hall-mark of Raghu Nath Choudhury's poetry that finds its finest expression in "Keteki" and "Dahikatara" fully justifying the title of the Bird-poet to his name.

The poems on bird can be broadly divided into three stages according to the development of the theme. The early poems represent the first stage. This is the stage of sensuous attraction of the adolescent mind. From adolescence he reaches manhood. In whatever stage the poet may be the bird is always there in the recesses of his mind. With the changes in life, the poet's approach to bird has undergone a sea-change. It is no longer the infatuation of the youth but a deeper and higher stage of relationship—the bird and the poet are not two identities but merging towards one and the same entity living an aerial, ethereal life of love and hope. "Maramor Pakhi", "Keteki Charai", "Gowahe Ebar Mor Priya Bihangini" belong to the first stage of sensuous appreciation of the bird's song. He hears with the ears the melodious song of the bird and he is simply enchanted. He yearns to see the bird but fails. But he enjoys the melody and is happy with the enjoyment. "Keteki" the *kavya* with five cantos, holds the balance between the sensuous appreciation and spiritual realisation of the transcendent beauty of the bird's haunting melody. This is the second stage of development. It is no longer the trepidation of the young heart but the idealisation of an unerring ethical being where the mind meets mind; heart meets heart. As years pass, maturity of mind comes. In calm of mind he surveys the whole scene of Man and Nature with deeper insight and clearer vision. This is the third stage—*supra sensual*,

supra mundane state of being when peace reigns supreme and the body and the mind are transported into a transcendental state of supreme bliss with Dahikatarā (Magpie) singing its eternal song and opening the newer and brighter vistas to the mind's eye. This is the meaning of "Dahikatarā", the last of the long series of bird poems of Raghu Nath Choudhury. In this transcendent stage the song of the bird leads the poet away from the sordid realities of life to a heartfelt, pagan appreciation of the sylvan world where no difference between life and external objects of nature exists. He attains a trance-like mood where material existence melts and he sees into the fundamental unity behind the diverse creations of the Universe. Wordsworth in his "Tintern Abbey" calls this :

A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

While the under-current of the bird theme continued all through his life, the sub-current of his love of flowers and other objects of nature appeared at times with equal force and vigour coupled with full form of poetic beauty and grace. His poem on rose (Golap) is as beautiful as the rose itself. The poet was enchanted by the beauty of the rose. He considers all that is beautiful and noble in the world—the Tazmahal, the Colossus, the Garden of Babylon—the reflection of the resplendent beauty and splendour of the Rose :

Phulili jidina dina maru udyanat
Uril saurav jagat juri
Gagan chumbi colossus tor
Pan Karile rup madhuri

—'Oh Rose! When you bloomed in the desert, your fragrance spread far and wide. Even the skyhigh colossus was overwhelmed with delight to see your beauty and breathe in the air perfumed by your fragrance'. A reference is made in this case to a poet's visit to Calcutta in connection with the editorial work of Jonaki. During

this visit he saw bewitching beauty of the roses at Dalhousie Square and took some saplings back home and reared the saplings in his own garden. When the roses bloomed in his garden it was a sight for the gods to see. This ultimately gave rise to his unique poem, "Golap". In "Bhetkali" (Water- lily) he describes the sight of the much-neglected flower whom there were "none to praise and very few to love". The flowers were blooming in a pond far from the habitation of men. The only visitor to the deserted area was the mild breeze that touched it caressingly and filled it with life removing its loneliness. The loving bee was humming its love-lorn tune in all its sweetness and softness. The moon was on the rise. The white beams of the moon gradually caressed and clasped the flowers in their tender and loving embrace. In this embrace the poet saw the perfect union of perfect hearts :

Cho-gharar para Jone marat bhumit
 Santana Kiron diche dhali
 Abhed atama duti biswasangsarat
 Hridaye hridayee gol mili

Silently the moon runs its race and its soft white beams kiss the lilies in the sequestered pond. Both entwine each other in a warm, everlasting embrace. The world has witnessed an ideal union never to be broken up again. As Shelly said :

The fountain mingles with the river,
 And the river with the ocean;
 The winds of heaven mix forever
 With a sweet emotion.

The poet feels that the lily must have learnt the divine art to keep the moon confined in the deserted, isolated pond and prays to the flower to teach him that divine art :

Kowachen kot pala ene isha gnan,
 Durvagak diya samidhan;
 Si kowa dharam niti karicho gohari
 Hridayat lavo dibya gnan.

—Oh! Dear Lily, what is the secret of your power? Where do you learn this divine lore? Oh! teach me, a forshaken heart, teach me your divine art so that I can also live in perpetual bliss mastering the same art and sharing the same life.

In "Gachar pat" (The leaves) he laments the falling of yellow leaves in winter which were bright and shining in spring : the leaves that attracted attention of the passers-by by their freshness and greenness from the boughs in spring are now lying low in the ground all yellow and rotten :

Achila edin tumi nabin pallav

Lajatei much koch jowa

Antarar gupta bhab rakhi antarat

Prakritik sadar jonewa

—O, you green leaves, you were fresh and bright to greet the spring with maiden grace and modesty; you kept all your secrets to yourself by virtue of your feminine reserve but always with the sweetness of a honeycomb you welcomed the luxurious spring—

Bichitra kalar gati! leela adbhut

Nubujilo bidhir bidhan,

Kali jak dekhi chilo nachibagifura

Aji tar dhulit sayan

—O, you young leaf, you do not know how time is advancing against you. How long will you be able to retain your greenness? Soon, very soon, you will turn grey, yellow, 'pestilence-stricken' and dead. Oh! the time! how quickly it changes? How strange are its ways? The same leaf that danced in the breeze only yesterday is lying low decrepit and lifeless today.

"Giri Mallika" (The wild flower) is another case of expanded personification on the theme of adoration of flowers. Here the poet speaks of a variety of wild flowers growing and blooming in Manikarneswar Hill on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra. Like the rose and the lily, giri mallika is also the mistress of the

scene—'a violet by a mossy stone'. The whole hill is overflowed with the beauty of the flower. Birds and bees are collecting honey from the giri mallikas. The poet enjoyed the scene with rapt interest. He remembers the myths and legends surrounding the flower and dilates on its probable connection with the storied past of Indian heritage. He asked himself : 'Is this the flower that disturbed Mahadev when he was in his trance-like mood. Out of anger for disturbing him in his meditation, Mahadev must have cursed the flower to be away from public view and to remain in a secluded area to bloom and 'blush unseen' and 'waste its sweetness in the jungle 'air'. The poet feels an identity of purpose between his lonely life and the sheer loneliness of the life of giri mallika :

Pranpriya aji mor bijan kunjat

Tulibane laylashe hahir taranga.

Oh! lady of my heart! Will the two lonely hearts unite to dispel the darkness from life and fill it with floods of harmonious laughter.

The speciality of the poem is the dexterous use of blank verse. Following the footsteps of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Bholanath Das, Rama Kanta Choudhury, Hiteswar Barbarua and many others, who used blank verse in Assamese poetry, Raghu Nath Choudhury brought this verse form to its perfection. The poem "Girimallika" and the kavya "Karbala" show his mastery of style and form in handling this metre. Though all his other poems are in traditional form "Duladi" and "Payar" the chhandas used by the great masters of Assamese poetry, Sankardev and Madhabdev, Raghu Nath excelled also in the use of this innovative technique of verse form. Again the alliterative use of "M" sound in his poems Madhabdev's complete is an excellent attempt at technical virtuosity with success. His knowledge of Sanskrit preeminently served him in his choice of Tatsama words in Giri mallika, and the poems of Dahikatarā where as in Sadan and Keteki his use of Tatbhāba words preponderate. While the diction of most of his poems in Sadari and Keteki is home-spun and simple, that of the poems of Duhikatarā and Karbala are grave and sonorous befitting to the

matter and style he undertook to perform.

Raghu Nath Choudhury carried the themes on birds and flowers to perfection. Similarly his interest in nature with its verdant splendour and autumnal mellowness was manifest in various poems. "Bohagir Biya" (wedding of spring) is a pick of the basket. It is an exquisite nature—myth—as joyous and enjoyable as the spring season itself. The season, Basanta (Spring), is presented as the bride-groom and the month, Bohag (first month of the Assamese year) is the bride. All the perquisites of an Assamese marriage ceremony are described with consummate skill and perfect understanding. All the birds, flowers, trees and plants and all other natural phenomena played their appropriate roles perfectly well in the celebration of the marriage festival :

Prakriti jiyari gavoru chowali
 Bohagi ayere biya
 Ulahe malahe sokalore jen
 Anande nadhare hiya.

—"Bohagi" is the daughter of nature. 'A lovelier flower than "Bohagi" was never sown on Earth' 'she grew to stately height.' As is customary, the negotiations for her marriage with Basanta were complete. Date was fixed. All objects of nature were beside themselves with joy to hear this good news. The bees were the messengers. They moved from tree to tree, from flower to flower, from one object to another inviting all to the wedding festival. Simalu, Palash, Ashoke and Madar changed their apparel befitting the occasion. The dry leaves were gone. Fresh green leaves appeared. The guests competed with each other in their finery and luxury. Kamini, Kanchan, Champa, Nageswar appeared in the best of their fragrance and colours. The gentle breeze is sprinkling perfume on all sides. The plants and flowers have combined their efforts to raise picturesque pandal and the golden gates. The starry sky in the canopy and the grassy fields are the carpets. The owl is ringing the morning bell. The cuckoo from the mango groves is ringing

upto heaven the good tidings of the lagna, the time of sampradan (offering of the bride). Dahi kataras are giving uruli (devotional singing). The Madhu Malaties are jostling against one another with their bewitching smiles. Patmadai coming in her best attire is ready to inaugurate the sampradan ceremony. All the golden flowers—Kanchan, Sonaru, Kanak and Champa—are binding the bridal lock. The morning sun is presenting Tilok (vermillion) on her forehead. The pollen grains of Kusum have powdered both the cheeks of her face. The pomegranate seeds are oscillating from her ear-lobes like well-fitted ear-rings. The Kunja-latikas covered the wrists of her hands like golden bangles. The wings of peacock offered the bridal dress—mekhala, chadar and riha. The butterflies presented exceptional design (buta) on the gorgeous dress. The Pira (pedestal) is bedecked with narzis and golaps. Aparajitas are encircling the waist line of the bride like a girdle. All the blooming flowers and sprouting leaves have converted the place to a fairy land burning incense and sprinkling abirs all around the campus. The clouds appear as the drummers, jilis as musician and tuni, bulbuli, and hetuluka as dancers. Keteki is singing marriage hymns with full-throated case. The night is a full-moon one. Mother earth is in a bright white dress as the moon beams have covered the land. The chorus led by Keteki has converted the world into a mysterious land of light and love. The Keteki flowers in the forest, the water-lilies in the ponds all redound to the glory of the nuptial evening. The living and the non-living have joined in the universal rejoicings. The poet shows an 'extra-ordinary development of imaginative powers' as Herford pointed out as one of the main characteristics of Romantic poetry. Raghu Nath Choudhury has expanded his acute observation of the minutest details of an Assamese marriage festival into the making of the exquisite myth in "Bohagir Biya".

The poem concludes with the universal note :

Aji purnimar ratito chikaon

Akash jonere bhara

Rajat dhabal snigdha kironat
 Hari uthe basundhara

... ..

Jar jagatat jiva jagatat
 Pao sakolote dekha
 Maha biswajuri birigiche jen
 Anandar purna rekha.

This night of all nights—a full moon night—looks all bright and golden with white beams of the moon transforming the whole world into an enchanted land and making the mother earth laugh uproariously with the whole creation.

The animate and the inanimate join the universal jubilation whichever way I look I see only the fullness of light and love in every direction.

As Browning says in his "Pipa Passes" :

The year's at the spring
 The day's at the morn;
 Morning's at seven
 The hill side's dew-pearled;
 The lark's on the wing;
 The snail's on the thorn;
 God's in his heaven—
 All's right with the world!

"Awahan" (The Invocation) is Raghu Nath Choudhury's earliest poem of nature. In one sense it is a topical poem composed and recited on the occasion of the inauguration of Cotton College in 1901. Cotton College is the first and premier institution of higher education in Assam. The poet exhorts the people to look before and after, to arise and awaken. The opening of the college augurs well for the future of the state which was then in a moribund stage :

Bishade malina dina hina aji
 Janani janam bhumī
 Dhariche tarun labanya murati
 Chale jai hiya pami

—The condition of our motherland beggars description. She is down and out. To look at her pale face is to be 'full of sorrow and leaden-eyed despair.' This is looking back. But let us look forward. The lamp of learning that is lit today will surely remove the darkness from our midst for ever :

Ahahe janani inder nivanani
 Diyahi Ynanar bhati
 Hriday mandir bhakti nere dhui
 Rakhicho achanpati

—Arise! My motherland! Raise your moonlike face! Ring out your dark days. Ring in the light of learning. Your worshippers are ready at the altar. They are full of devotion. They want to enter into ways of new life. The wave of patriotism that swept the land at that time vibrates in many stanzas of the poem. At the same time there are felicitous touches of nature :

Prati gache gache latai latai
 Nabin madhuri khele
 Abyakta arao suni bihangar
 Nache pran tale tale

Every tree and every plant is putting on its new leaf, new flower. Birds are chirping and singing their sweet souls. Bees are humming their spring time tunes. And all life is dancing to the rhythm of nature.

There are eight stanzas of beautiful descriptions of nature. As the poet recited his self-composed poem before the full audience, there was wide-spread appreciation and the poet was hailed as a budding poet of nature. In poems after poems he exhibited his happy valiancy of poetic power and more than fulfilled the promise

raised by his early poems. When "Sadari" was published in 1910 he was recognised as a people's poet. People appreciated the simplicity of his thought and the sweetness of his diction. His next venture was "Keteki". It raised his position to the highest pedestal. It was called a *kabya*. It was unique in its structure and content. The bird that appeared in three poems of "Sadari" became inextricably mixed up with the sense and sensibilities of the poet in Keteki. The earlier bird was an object of physical adoration. Now it is an object of spiritual exhilaration. The poet discovered a new meaning, a nexus between the present and the past performance of the bird through the corridor of history and mythology, permeating the whole consciousness of man's heritage. The *kavya* appealed to all strata of the reading public—the scholars and the common readers because of its originality of conception and novelty of treatment. He was now a firmly established poet of Assamese literature. Critics vied with each other in coining appropriate titles to the poet. Bihagi Kabi (Bird-poet), Prakriti Kabi (Nature poet), Bairagi Kabi (A poet of renunciation) and Birahi Kabi (a love lorn-poet) are some of the coinages. He is popularly known as a bird poet though much can be said on each of the counts referred to. He was also awarded the title 'Kabi Ratna' (Jewel of a poet) by Kamrup Sanjibani Sabha considering the overall quality of his poetical works. Rabindra Parisad of Guwahati offered a great ovation to him with a citation praising him for his life-long devotion and lasting contribution to Assamese literature. Yes, his was a life-long devotion to literature. He edited four epoch-making magazines in Assamese. He composed a poem "Urbashi" at the age of 84. He handled Mandakranta metre of Meghdoot in his "Raj Rajeswari Champa" (The Royal Champa) when he was 89, and, that too, when he was bed-ridden. Even from his sick bed he conducted the proceedings of Sabita Sabha and presided over many of its meetings held regularly every fortnight in his residence towards the fag end of his life. Such was his zeal and dedication to literature.

End of his life was another chapter of deep pain and extreme pathos just like the beginning of his life. Against his doctor's advice he had his eyes operated on just when he was on the threshold of ninety. His impulsive nature yearned to see the daylight and the moonlight, to see the faces of his loved and loving ones—men and nature. But it was not to be. The operation performed in his bed-room was an exercise in futility. Neither the cataract could be removed nor the partial vision, with which he could see and laugh, could be restored. He lay there in his bed-room perpetually confined, sightless, and sorrowful and gasping for air and light of the other world of which he dreamed all his life. As Tennyson said :

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place

The flood may bear me far.

I hope to see my Pilot face to face

When I have cros't the bar.

(Crossing the Bar)

In one of his early poems on death (Maran) he imagined death as his lifelong companion—dwellers of the same house. At every step of life, at every moment, Death is peeping at him through the window of his body : Now is the time for you; you take my whole body, the whole house :

Aha mor chira sangi aha priya sakha

Tomar mukhake chai duhh paharim

Dibyarup dhari tumi diba mok dekha

Jitina chitak mai sabati dharum.

Come my life-long partner; come my dear friend. It is your turn now. My time is up. In your divine embrace let me forget all my cares and anxieties. The burning pyre will free the soul to begin its eternal journey.

In one of his last poems on death "Phulasayya" (The Bridal night), the poet's preoccupation with death comes out in brighter colour but without the slightest trace of terror or sadness in it :

Jwaliche durat sou pralayar sikha
 Dhariche ki rup bitopan
 Seye mor phulasayya rakta kamalar
 Lom tate ananta sayan.

—I see the terrible brightness of the pyre. It is beaconing to me with its magnetic attraction. The red lotuses are calling me to their midst. That is my bridal bed. That is the place of my eternal rest.

In the small hours of the dawn of 20 November, 1967, his soul broke loose the bondage of the body and flew away to the land of beauty—land of the rose and the nightingale of which he sang in the most eloquent terms. The poet of nature returned to nature. In the words of P. B. Shelley :

He is made one with Nature : there is heard
 His voice in all her music

....

He is a portion of the loveliness
 Which once he made more lovely.

Thousands of mourners bid tearful farewell as the leaping flames consumed his mortal remains in the Navagraha Hills. They prayed in one voice, 'let the angels of heaven sing him to eternal rest'.

III

Epilogue

Like Keats Raghu Nath Choudhury came from an obscure origin and rose to meteoric heights in Assam in his chosen field of work. Like Shakespeare and many other geniuses, he had no formal education in schools and colleges but formal education in Assamese medium or Assamese subject is not complete without the sprinkling of a fair number of poems selected from Raghu Nath Choudhury's works from the earliest to the latest stage of study. Like Wordsworth he did not require the spectacles of books to study Nature. He was naturally learned; and knew every flower and every tree as he knew every member of his family. His plants and birds are not bookish but perfectly natural and fresh and familiar. He was not a linguist but his command over languages—Assamese, Bengali, Sanskrit and Urdu—surpasses the reach of many an outstanding scholar. What is more, he could adapt and adjust foreign words in native garb in such a way that they lose their alienness and become fully attuned to Assamese vocabulary. When we say 'Arab Piyari Basara Ranir / Gul Badan pelali jur' or 'Badshah Harem Kari guljar / Dil dariat tulili ban' we are not aware of any harshness of intrusion of foreign words but become fully acclimatised to the diction as our own natural way of expression. His "Karbala" abounds in Urdu words but the poet succeeds in blending these words perfectly into the Assamese diction. And in Sanskrit, he was like a young horse romping in a green meadow. His expressions like 'Patra Puspa falahin Taru' or 'Marahishe Jiwanar durlava madhuri' are fully cast into Assamese mould. His choice of words, his mastery of diction bear eloquent testimony to his creative power. His "Madhur" and "Girimalika" are Sanskritised Assamese poems. He not only enriches our sensibility but enriches our vocabulary too.

He took the vow of celibacy when Garga Ram Choudhury died leaving everything under the care and custody of Raghu Nath Choudhury. Raghu Nath Choudhury spared no pains to fulfil the trust reposed on him by his only saviour and benefactor in life. Side by side his fame as a poet and as a literary editor of important magazines spread far and wide. Very soon he became the central figure in Guwahati. From the development of the funeral ground at Navagraha hill to the participation in freedom movement he played a seminal role. His advice was always sought and faithfully followed. He was the dear Raghu Ata (dear grand-pa) to all, high and low. His house became the meeting place of all sections of people—a nursery of young talents, a repository of wise and lively tales and stories, a forum for discussion of all vital issues—literary, cultural, social and political. He established Sabita Sabha—a literary and cultural organisation—and ably conducted its proceedings regularly during his life-time as its permanent president. He lived with men. He lived for men. He left behind a wealth of lyricism that 'posterity will not willingly let die'.

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Appendix 1

Events of life at a glance

- 1878 Birth (6th Magh) at Laopara Village
 Father : Bholanath Choudhury
 Mother : Dayalata Choudhury
- 1878 When nine months old, fell from a high plinth to the ground below; broke his left leg; damaged right leg remained permanently crippled.
- 1882 Cholera broke out in the village in an epidemic form. His mother, father and sister fell victims to the disease. His father developed temporary insanity. Joypal Das, a near relative gave shelter to Raghu Nath, a forlorn child of the devastated family.
- 1884 Bholanath recovered from insanity. Set his house in order. Took Raghunath to his home and started education under a home tutor, Kashi Nath, a village school master.
- 1885 Left village home for Guwahati under the guardianship of Garga Ram Choudhury, a distant relative and a Nazir at D.C.'s Court at Guwahati.
- 1887 Admitted to Guwahati M. V. School.
- 1896 Passed M. V. Final Exam.
 Admitted to Collegiate High school, Guwahati.
- 1897 The great earthquake, school building collapsed. Classes started in school hostel. Differences arose with a teacher. Left school for good.
- 1898 Left Guwahati for Tezpur by steamer as a protest against Garga Ram Choudhury's insistence to join school. Sobha Ram Das, a worker of the steamer company recognised him and took him back to Guwahati.

- Garga Ram Choudhury wanted him to learn Court Vendorship but he found the task unsatisfactory.
- His father Bhola Nath Choudhury made an unsuccessful attempt to persuade his son to resume his studies.
- Bhola Nath returned to Laopara, a totally frustrated man.
- The father and the son never met again.
- 1899 Death of his father. A rude shock to Raghunath Choudhury.
- 1898 Appointed Head Pandit at Uzanbazar Primary school, under Guwahati municipality.
- 1899 Started Sanskrit education both at Manikul Tol and at home.
- Met renowned teacher Mahamohopadhyay Dhireswaracharyya and another famous teacher Bal Mukunda Jha from Benaras. Both the teachers lived for sometime in the house of Gargaram Choudhury.
- A unique opportunity to Raghunath Choudhury to learn Sanskrit : a turning point in his career.
- 1900 Started a public Library under Suniti Sanskarini Sabha.
- 1901 Recited a self composed poem 'Awahan' (An invocation) before a huge audience on the occasion of inauguration ceremony of Cotton College.
- Appointed Asst Editor of 'Jonaki'.
- 1902 Municipality school abolished. Teaching job ends.
- 1903 Annual function of Suniti Sancharini Sabha highlighting the literary movement which was gathering momentum.
- Death of Gargaram Choudhury bearing Raghunath Choudhury at the sole custodian of the family.
- Vow of celibacy by Raghunath Choudhury to fulfil the trust reposed on him by his only benefactor, Gargaram Choudhury.

- 1905 Plunged headlong into the freedom movement of the country. Worked as volunteer and picketeer at steamer ghat and other important places.
- 1908 Started cultivation work at Beltola farm house.
- 1910 Published 'Sadari' his first anthology of poems.
- 1911 Again appointed school teacher in a German Roman Catholic Missionary school.
- 1914 World War I. The German missionary school abolished.
—Cultivation work at Beltola with renewed vigour.
—Started development work amongst the tribal people at Beltola.
- 1918 Published 'Keteki'—a full length bird poem called 'Kavya' on epic structure.
- 1921 Participation in the Non-co-operation Movement.
—Suffered imprisonment for fifteen months.
- 1923 Released from Jail.
—Returned to farm house at Beltola— found every thing in a shamble— returned to his original residence at Uzanbazar.
—Published 'Karbala', an epic on Maharrum.
- 1925 Edited Children Magazine, Maina (the Tiny tots.)
- 1925-42 Worked again in the farm house at Beltola.
- 1931 Published 'Dahikatara'— another Kavya, a full length poem on bird on epic style.
- 1936 Elected President of the 18th Session of Assam Sahitya Sabha held at Tezpur.
- 1937 Edited 'Jayanti', a journal new trends in Assamese literature.
- 1940 Edited 'Surabhi' : a magazine of sweet but serious articles on literature and culture.
- 1947 Kamrup Sanjibani Sabha awarded the title 'Kabiratna' to him.

- 1952 Participation in the World Peace Conference at Calcutta, Moscow Radio announcing him as a unique voice for world peace.
Govt. of India offered him a literary pension.
- 1953 Establishment of 'Sabita Sabha' a forum for regular literary and cultural discussion of which he was a life long president.
—Rabindra Parishad of Guwahati offered him an ovation with a Manpatra for his outstanding contribution to Assamese literature.
- 1958 Published 'Nava Mallika' (The new leaves)— a collection of prose-poems.
—Took leading part in presenting materials before the State Reorganisation Commission.
- 1960 Participation in The State Language Movement of Assam.
- 1961 Public ovation in a function arranged by Assam Sahitya Sabha in collaboration with Sabita Sabha held at Sudmersen Hall of Cotton College under the Presidentship of Justice Haliram Dekua, the then Chief Justice of Assam.
—Release of a birth day presentation volume entitled 'Kavi Choudhury Aru Choudhury Dewar Kabita' written by Prof Kamaleswar Sarma of Cotton College, published by Assam Sahitya Sabha and offered to the poet on the occasion with all solemnity and grandeur by Prof Maheswar Neog, the then Secretary of Assam Sahitya Sabha.
- 1967 The grand old man of Assamese literature, a nonagerian passed away in the early hours of 18th November. Thousands of mourners from all walks of life attended his funeral at Navagraha Hill and paid their respectful homage with heart-felt grief.

Appendix II
A bunch of flowers

A Child's Prayer (Iswar)

(1)

Where art thou, oh, Lord!
 Why can't we see or know,
We are your little children here,
 Calling you as loud as our voices go.

(2)

We are your little children here,
 We do not know how to pray;
Are you the sun, the moon or the stars?
 And remain far far away.

(3)

We do not know your loving words,
 We are your little children here.
But we feel your voice is ringing
 All the time here, there, everywhere.

(4)

This we know you are our Lord!
 We offer our warm love to you;
We are your little children here
 Our heart is filled with your love too.

(5)

Strange are your ways, oh, Lord!
 We are your little children here;
Shower upon us from distant land
 Your blessings, love, and care.

My Desire
(Hepah)

In the lake of my mind
 The golden lotuses bloom
I wish I were the gentle breeze
 To unfold its fragrance true
And move with the humming bee
 Gathering nectar far and free.

In the garden of my mind
 Malatis, Tagars, are in bloom
I wish I were the morning sun
 To make the whole horizon illumine
And keep my heart suffused
 With eternal drops of love-dew.

The queen of spring is in her royal reign
 All in her verdant robe again
I wish I were the bird
 To sing the advent of spring
And colour her rosy cheeks
 With Kumkum and Hengul paint.

The evening moon smiles sweetly in the sky,
 A charming, bewitching smile!
I wish I were the blue sea
 To hold the image in my palm;
And fill the little birdie of my mind
 With ecstasy of pure love.

•

My grief
(Bishad)

In an autumn morning the poet was reclining in a grove. The sight of a sewali plant attracted. The sewali flowers were all in bloom. The sweet-smelling small white flowers lightly moved in the wind. The poet was enchanted by the sight of a little sparrow playing peacefully amidst the flowers briskly dancing in the gentle breeze. The poet was in the happiest form of his mind. Little could he think of the turn of events and reversal of fortune that may occur any time anywhere. But this exactly happened before his very eyes. A gust of wind began to blow very violently smashing the sewali lock stock and barrel. The branches fell; the flowers were gone. The sparrow flew away. The rain and hailstorm, the wild west wind ushered in the hard days the chilly winter and the foul summer. There was nothing but a scene of desolation. The poet was grief-stricken to see the huge devastation taking place within the twinkling of his eye. This reminded him of the evanescence of youth and glory of human life. In his heart of heart he knows that fullness of spring and mellowness of Autumn will reappear in nature in the course of another year. But life has only one course to run from the cradle to the grave. Once the bloom of youth is gone, it is gone for ever. The cyclic change we see in nature is typically absent in life. Oh! what a difference! There is nothing like second childhood, second youth in human life. This is the fact of eternal sadness in life : the cause of perpetual grief of the poet's heart.

•

My Beloved Bird
(Maramar Pakhi)

A big river was flowing down the land. Its strong current was sweeping away the trees, timbers, plants and other debris that came in its course. The river mingled with the sea with a joyous, soft 'inland murmur'.

A tall old banyan tree was standing like a sentinel on the banks of the river. Its root struck deep into the ground in an inviolable bond of love and friendship. Birds of the neighbouring areas came to build their nests in the branches of the tree. They were seen constantly playing, chirping and dancing there.

The attention of the poet was drawn to a pretty, small bird perching peacefully among the leaves of a branch of the tree. The wings of the bird reflected the bright, golden sunshine. It radiated light in its surroundings.

The poet's eye was caught by the eyes of the little birdie— a pair of small glistening eyes twinkling like stars. The eyes were exquisitely beautiful— the marvel of creation!

A flock of birds was singing and dancing to the tune of the small beautiful bird. A cool breeze was blowing and wafting the soft, sweet notes all around the tree.

The place was transformed in a fairy land. The poet was enraptured to hear the melodious song. The thrilling voice of the small bird reverberated and filled the area. Lost in joy and wonder the poet was enamoured of the song-bird. He longed to make it his pet and enjoy the same song during his life-time.

The poet moved on tip-toe towards the nest of the bird. He climbed the tree through bushes and thorns and captured the bird overcoming all obstacles. He took it up tenderly and handled it with care. A golden cage was arranged as its nest beside his bedroom. He gave the bird spring-water to drink and delicious fruits

to eat. His only desire was to see the bird and enjoy its songs.

But alas! the bird thought otherwise. An alien rule however precious was not to its liking. It broke loose the golden filaments of the cage and flew away to its own habitat in the forest never to be seen again. The poet was left heart broken and forlorn.

Appendix III

Specimens from his poems (Transliteration)

Madhuri

Manda manda makaranda
Modita Madhabi kunju
Mridu Madhu rashe mathita mardita
Manjula manjula punja.

Mridul madhur malay marute
Mrita sanjiban ani
Mumursha janar diche marmasthale
Mangal madhur sani

Mallika Malatis Magadhi mukul
Mukulita manja kunje
Madhumay gandha madira manashe
Madantha Madhupe gunje

Miliche Madhabi Madhabi parashe
Makanda manjari sange
Madhurimamay mangalya manthita
Manju madhu bana ange

Matta madalapi mate muhurmuhu
Mohini mohana swate
Maninir jen mardile maram
Madanar panchasare

Manthar gamane manash sarashe
Maral maral badhu

Mukta sangi sange bhunje maharange
Mridul mrinal madhu.

Meghagamagame malancha mandape
Mayur mayuri gan

Mohan nartane mohu made matta
Mohiche manab man.

Mandire mandire mumukhsu mandali
Mridanga manjir bai
Mahesh mahima madhur kirtan
Mahananda mane gai.

Mukharita aha madhur misrane
Manju kunja bana raji
Mama mano kunje udishe madhur
Mohan murali baji.

... ..

Keteki
(A few excerpts)

Korpara tai ahili sonai
 kon dishe jawa uri,
 Kiyaba phuricha dur duranit
 Akalai ghuri ghuri?

Lokalok eri nijan bhumit
 Nubuja bhashare tai,
 Ki mat maticha kihar ashat
 Nubujo bihagi mai.

Dewar durlav anicha ki dhan
 Kakno milai dibi,
 Kimba I dehar bhal bastukhini
 Kon deshaloi nibi?

Alanghya girir shikhari shikare
 Dhara binaniyasur,
 Ketiyaba goi tatini tirar
 Nisthbhata kara dur.

Bijan banat prantar bhumit
 Manat ki lai phura,
 Kot eri thai paran manik
 Akaioi akairs ghuri.

Golap
(excerpt)

Kar parasat phulili bandhai
O'mor sadari phulan pahi?
Shyamali patar orani guchai
Kar phale chai manli hahi?

Kon nandanat lagali chamak
Nachiche jot pari bulbul,
Abhisapta hai bilash kunjat
Prem madirat jen mochgul.

Hashna hanar tibra gondhat
Sapon bibhor madhabi nisha,
Tor parasat birahi jonar
Palal ne priye pranar trisha!

Arab piyari basra ranir
Gulbadan pelali jur,
Bhahi phure tor rup tarangat
Papiyar snigdha karun sur!

Phulili jidina marn udyanat
Uril saurav jagat juri,
Gagan chumbi kolossase tor
Pan karile rup madhuri.

... ..

Bohagir Biya
(excerpt)

Prakriti jiyari gavaru chowali
Bohagi ayere biya
Ulah malahe sakalore jen
Anande nadhare hiya.

Swarag marat sakalo thayiste
Udiche ananda rol
Sajan kachan rang rupahat
Gotei jagat bhol.

Abyakta sarat premik bhramare
Dile sakalote jan
Gach latikar paats sire sire
Munjari uthil pran.

Simalu palash ashok mandar
Shyamal bitapi raji
jirna abharan salai ahiche
Rangali sajere saji

Kamini kanchan champa nageswar
Sugandhi kusum mala
Nana rup dhari puspa kananat
Patiche premar mala.

....

Dahi Katara

O Marami bandhu mor o dahi katara
 Kon murchanat tor baje dotara
 Milan madhuri loi
 Ahicha sadari ai
 Kon birahik dibi premar batara
 Padulite ache roi gulandi katara

Alok ne andhakar sadan prantar
 Kon sagarar para
 Amrit gural bhora
 Meli dica saphurati mohini kanthar
 Boi gol biswabyapi dik digantar

Koneno pathale tok kalakanthi kari
 Pube dile dhal phat
 Marili suwadi mat
 Sitali malaya bawe dile pal tari
 Prakritir nistabdhata gol bhet kari

Jah gol barsha gol ahil sarat
 Bidyadhari chitra lekha
 Khanjani dilehi dekha
 Nache kata chanda tuli karun surat
 Chamak logali kino nandan parat.

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- | | |
|--------------|--|
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 had the longest run as a text book</p> |
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